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UTILITY APPLICATION AND APPLICATION FEE TRANSMITTAL (1.53(b))

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS

Box Patent Application

Washington, D.C. 20231

Sir:

Transmitted herewith for filing is the patent application of

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For:

SPEECH SYNTHESIZING APPARATUS AND METHOD, AND STORAGE
MEDIUM THEREFOR

Enclosed are:

☒ 22 page(s) of specification, 1 page(s) of Abstract, 8 Page(s) of claims

☒ 6 sheets of drawing ☒ formal ☐ informal

☐ Page(s) of Declaration and Power of Attorney

☐ Unsigned

☐ Newly Executed

☐ Copy from prior application

☐ Deletion of inventors including Signed Statement under 37 C.F.R. § 1.63(d)(2)

☒ Incorporation by Reference: The entire disclosure of the priority application(s) identified below, is considered as being part of the disclosure of the accompanying application and is incorporated herein by reference.

☐ Microfiche Computer Program (Appendix)

☐ _____ page(s) of Sequence Listing

☐ computer readable disk containing Sequence Listing

☐ Statement under 37 C.F.R. § 1.821(f) that computer and paper copies of the Sequence Listing are the same

☒ Claim for Priority Japanese Application No. 10-245951 filed 8/31/98

- ☐ Certified copy of Priority Document(s)
- ☐ English translation documents
- ☐ Information Disclosure Statement
- ☐ Copy of ___cited references w/ English Abstracts
- ☐ Copy of PTO-1449 filed in parent application serial No. _____.
- ☐ Preliminary Amendment
- ☒ Return receipt postcard (MPEP 503)
- ☐ Assignment Papers (assignment cover sheet and assignment documents)
- ☐ A check in the amount of \$40.00 for recording the Assignment.
- ☐ Assignment papers filed in parent application Serial No. _____.
- ☐ Certification of chain of title pursuant to 37 C.F.R. § 3.73(b).
- ☐ This is a ☐ continuation ☐ divisional ☐ continuation-in-part (C-I-P) of prior application serial no. _____.
- ☐ Cancel in this application original claims _____ of the parent application before calculating the filing fee. (At least one original independent claim must be retained for filing purposes.)
- ☐ A preliminary Amendment is enclosed. (Claims added by this Amendment have been properly numbered consecutively beginning with the number following the highest numbered original claim in the prior application.
- ☐ The status of the parent application is as follows:
- ☐ A Petition For Extension of Time and a Fee therefor has been or is being filed in the parent application to extend the term for action in the parent application until _____.
- ☐ A copy of the Petition for Extension of Time in the co-pending parent application is attached.
- ☐ No Petition For Extension of Time and Fee therefor are necessary in the co-pending parent application.
- ☐ Please abandon the parent application at a time while the parent application is pending or at a time when the petition for extension of time in that application is granted and while this application is pending has been granted a filing date, so as to make this application co-pending.
- ☐ Transfer the drawing(s) from the patent application to this application.
- ☐ Amend the specification by inserting before the first line the sentence:
This is a ☐ continuation ☐ divisional ☐ continuation-in-part of co-pending application Serial No. _____ filed _____.

I. CALCULATION OF APPLICATION FEE (For Other Than A Small Entity)

	Number Filed		Number Extra	Rate	Basic Fee \$ 760.00
Total Claims	24	-20=	4	x\$18.00	\$ 72.00
Independent Claims	3	- 3=	0	x78.00	\$ 0
Multiple Dependent Claims	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no </div> <div> Additional Fee = \$260.00 Add'l Fee = NONE </div> <div>\$</div> </div>				

Total: \$832.00

- ☐ A statement claiming small entity status is attached or has been filed in the above-identified parent application and its benefit under 37 C.F.R. § 1.28(a) is hereby claimed. Reduced fees under 37 C.F.R. § 1.9(F) (50% of total) paid herewith \$ _____.
- ☒ A check in the amount of \$832.00 for payment of the application filing fees is attached.
- ☐ Charge Fee(s) to Deposit Account No. 13-4500. Order No. _____. A DUPLICATE COPY OF THIS SHEET IS ATTACHED.
- ☒ The Assistant Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required for filing this application, or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 13-4500, Order No. 1232-4563. A DUPLICATE COPY OF THIS SHEET IS ATTACHED.

Respectfully submitted,

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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant(s) : Yasuo Okutani and Masayuki Yamada
Serial No. : TBA Group Art Unit : TBA
Filed : August 27, 1999 (Herewith)
For : SPEECH SYNTHESIZING APPARATUS AND METHOD, AND STORAGE
MEDIUM THEREFOR

EXPRESS MAIL CERTIFICATE

Express Mail Label No. EJ542834993US

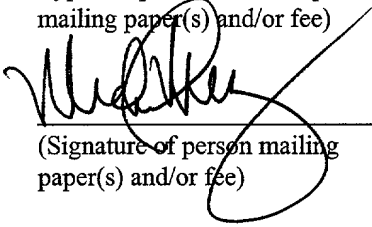
Date of Deposit August 30, 1999

I hereby certify that the following attached paper(s) and/or fee
Application Fee Transmittal (in duplicate); 22 pp. of specs., 1 page of abstract, 8 Pp. claims (24 TOTAL
claims); 6 Sheets of Formal Drawings (Figs. 1-6); Check in the amount of \$832.00 and return receipt
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is being deposited with the United States Postal Service "Express Mail Post Office to Addressee" service under 37
C.F.R. §1.10 on the date indicated above and is addressed to the Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Box New
Applications, Washington, D.C. 20231.

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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

SPEECH SYNTHESIZING APPARATUS AND METHOD, AND STORAGE
MEDIUM THEREFOR

5

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 This invention relates to an speech synthesizing
apparatus having a database for managing phoneme data,
in which the apparatus performs speech synthesis using
the phoneme data managed by the database. The invention
further relates to a method of synthesizing speech using
this apparatus, and to a storage medium storing a
program for implementing this method.

15 A method of speech synthesis which concatenates
waveform (which will be referred to as the
"Concatenative synthesis method" below) is available in
the prior art as a method of synthesizing speech. The
Concatenative synthesis method changes prosody with a
20 Pitch synchronous overlap adding method (P-SOLA) which
changes prosody by placing pitch waveform units
extracted from the original waveform unit in conformity
with a desired pitch timing. An advantage of the
Concatenative synthesis method is that the synthesized
25 speech obtained is more natural than that provided by a
synthesis method based upon parameters. A disadvantage

is that the allowable range for the change in prosody is narrow.

Accordingly, sound quality is improved by preparing speech data of a wide variety of variations, selecting
5 these properly and using them. Information such as the phoneme environment (the phoneme that is the object of synthesis or several phonemes including both sides thereof) and the fundamental frequency F_0 is used as the criteria for selecting the synthesis unit.

10 However, the conventional method of synthesizing speech described above involves a number of problems.

By way of example, if a database contains a plurality of items of phoneme data which satisfy a
certain phoneme environment and the fundamental
15 frequency F_0 , the phoneme unit used in synthesis is one phoneme unit (e.g., the phoneme unit that appears in the database first) selected randomly from these items of phoneme data. Since the database is a collection of speech uttered by human beings, all of the phoneme data
20 is not necessarily stable (i.e., not necessarily of good quality). The database may contain phoneme data that is the result of mumbling, a halting voice, slowness of speech or hoarseness. If one item of phoneme data is selected randomly from such a collection of data,
25 naturally there is the possibility that sound quality will decline when synthesized speech is generated.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5 Accordingly, an object of the present invention is to provide a speech synthesizing apparatus and method capable of appropriately selecting phoneme data used in speech synthesis and of suppressing any decline in sound quality in speech synthesis, as well as a storage medium
10 storing a program for implementing this method.

 According to one aspect of the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing a speech synthesizing apparatus comprising: storage means for storing plural items of phoneme data; retrieval means
15 for retrieving phoneme data, in accordance with given retrieval conditions, from the plural items of phoneme data stored in the storage means; penalty assigning means for assigning a penalty that is based upon an attribute value to each item of phoneme data retrieved
20 by the retrieval means; and selection means for selecting, from the phoneme data retrieved by the retrieval means, and based upon the penalty assigned by the penalty assigning means, phoneme data to be employed in synthesis of a speech waveform.

25 According to another aspect of the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing

1 a speech synthesizing method comprising: a storage step
of storing plural items of phoneme data; a retrieval
step of retrieving phoneme data, in accordance with
given search retrieval conditions, from the plural items
5 of phoneme data stored at the storage step; a penalty
assigning step of assigning a penalty that is based upon
an attribute value to each item of phoneme data
retrieved at the retrieval step; and a selection step of
selecting, from the phoneme data retrieved at the
10 retrieval step, and based upon the penalty assigned at
the penalty assigning step, phoneme data employed in
synthesis of a speech waveform.

The present invention further provides a storage
medium storing a control program for causing a computer
15 to implement the method of synthesizing speech described
above.

Other features and advantages of the present
invention will be apparent from the following
description taken in conjunction with the accompanying
20 drawings, in which like reference characters designate
the same or similar parts throughout the figures
thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

25

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated

in and constitute a part of the specification,
illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together
with the description, serve to explain the principles of
the invention.

5 Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing the construction
of a speech synthesizing apparatus according to a first
embodiment of the present invention;

10 Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating functions
relating to phoneme data selection processing according
to the first embodiment;

Fig. 3 is a flowchart illustrating a procedure
relating to phoneme data selection processing according
to the first embodiment;

15 Fig. 4 is a block diagram illustrating functions
relating to phoneme data selection processing according
to the second embodiment;

Fig. 5 is a flowchart illustrating a procedure
relating to phoneme data selection processing according
to the second embodiment; and

20 Fig. 6 is a flowchart useful in describing an
overview of speech synthesizing processing.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

25 Preferred embodiments of the present invention will
now be described in detail in accordance with the

accompanying drawings.

[First Embodiment]

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating the construction of a speech synthesizing apparatus according to a first embodiment of the present invention.

As shown in Fig. 1, the apparatus includes a control memory (ROM) 101 which stores a control program for causing a computer to implement control in accordance with a control procedure shown in Fig. 3, a central processing unit 102 for executing processing such as decisions and calculations in accordance with the control procedure retained in the control memory 101, and a memory (RAM) 103 which provides a work area for when the central processing unit 102 executes various control operations. Allocated to the memory 103 are an area 202 for holding the results of phoneme retrieval, an area 204 for holding the results of penalty assignment, an area 207 for holding the results of sorting, and an area 209 for holding representative phoneme data. These areas will be described later with reference to Fig. 2. The apparatus further includes a disk device 104 which, in this embodiment, is a hard disk. The disk device 104 stores a database 200 described later with reference to Fig. 2. The data of database 200 is stored in memory 103 when the data is

used. A bus 105 connects the components mentioned above.

The speech synthesizing apparatus of this embodiment uses information such as the phoneme
5 environment and fundamental frequency to select the appropriate phoneme data from speech data that has been recorded in the database 200 (Fig. 2) and performs waveform editing synthesis employing the selected data.

Fig. 6 is a flowchart illustrating an overview of
10 speech synthesizing processing according to this embodiment. The phoneme environment and fundamental frequency of a phoneme to be used are specified at step S11 in Fig. 6. This may be carried out by storing the phoneme environment and fundamental frequency in the
15 disk device 104 as a parameter file or by entering them via a keyboard. Next, at step S12, phoneme data to be used is selected from the database 200. This is followed by step S13, at which it is determined whether phoneme data to be selected exists. Control returns to
20 step S11 if such data exists. If it is determined that all necessary phoneme data has been selected, on the other hand, control proceeds from step S13 to step S14 and speech synthesis by waveform editing is executed using the selected phoneme data.

25 The details of processing for selecting the phoneme data at step S12 will now be described. In the case

described below, selection of phoneme data is carried out using the phoneme environment (three phonemes composed of the phoneme of interest and one phoneme on each side thereof, these being referred to as a so-called "triphone") and the average fundamental frequency of the phoneme as criteria for selecting phoneme data.

Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating functions relating to phoneme data selection processing for selecting the optimum phoneme data from a set of phoneme data in which the phoneme environments and fundamental frequencies are identical. The functions are those of a speech synthesizing apparatus according to the first embodiment.

The database 200 in Fig. 2 stores speech data in which a phoneme environment, phoneme boundary and fundamental frequency, power and phoneme duration are have been assigned to each item of phoneme data. A phoneme retrieval unit 201 retrieves phoneme data, which satisfies a specific phoneme environment and fundamental frequency, from the database 200. The area 202 stores a set of phoneme data, namely the results of retrieval performed by the phoneme retrieval unit 201. A power-penalty assignment processing unit 203 assigns a penalty related to power to each item of phoneme data of the set of phoneme data stored in the area 202. The area 204 holds the results of the assignment of penalties to the

phoneme data. A duration-penalty assignment processing unit 205 assigns a penalty relating to phoneme duration to each items of phoneme data.

5 A sorting processing unit 206 subjects the set of phoneme data to sorting processing regarding specific information (power or phoneme duration, etc.) when a penalty is assigned. The area 207 holds the results of sorting. In regard to the results obtained by assigning penalties, a data determination processing unit 208
10 selects phoneme data having the smallest penalty as representative phoneme data. The area 209 holds the representative phoneme data that has been decided.

From the speech synthesizing processing set forth above, processing for selecting phoneme data implemented
15 by the above-described functional arrangement will be discussed next. Fig. 3 is a flowchart illustrating a procedure relating to phoneme data selection processing for selecting the optimum phoneme data from the set of phoneme data having identical phoneme environments and
20 fundamental frequencies.

First, at step S301, all phoneme data that satisfies the phoneme environment (triphone) and fundamental frequency F_0 that were specified at step S11 is extracted from the database 200 and is stored in area
25 202. Next, at step S302, the power-penalty assignment processing unit 203 assigns power-related penalties to

the set of phoneme data that has been stored in area 202.

The guideline involving power-related penalties is to assign large penalties to phoneme data having power values that depart from an average value of power because the goal is to select phoneme data having an average value of power within the set of phoneme data.

The power-penalty assignment processing unit 203 instructs the sorting processing unit 206 to sort the phoneme data set, which has been extracted from the area 202 that holds the results of retrieval, based upon values of power. Power referred to here may be the power of the phoneme data or the average power per unit of time.

The sorting processing unit 206 responds by sorting the phoneme data set based upon power and storing the results in the area 207 that is for retaining the results of sorting. The power-penalty assignment processing unit 203 waits for sorting to end and then assigns a penalty to the sorted phoneme data that has been stored in area 207. A penalty is assigned in accordance with the guideline mentioned above. For example, among items of phoneme data that have been sorted in order of decreasing power, a penalty (e.g., 2.0 points) is added onto phoneme data whose power values fall within the smaller one-third of values and

onto phoneme data whose power values fall within the larger one-third of values. In other words, a penalty is assigned to phoneme data other than the middle one-third of phoneme data.

5 Next, at step S303, the duration-penalty assignment processing unit 205 assigns a penalty relating to phoneme duration through a procedure similar to that of the power-penalty assignment processing unit 203. Specifically, the duration-penalty assignment processing
10 unit 205 instructs the sorting processing unit 206 to perform sorting based upon phoneme duration and stores the results in area 207. On the basis of the sorted results, the duration-penalty assignment processing unit 205 adds a penalty (e.g., 2.0 points) onto phoneme data
15 whose phoneme durations fall within the smaller one-third of durations and onto phoneme data whose phoneme durations fall within the larger one-third of durations. The results obtained by the assignment of the penalty are retained in area 204. Control then proceeds to step
20 S304.

Step S304 calls for the data determination processing unit 208 to determine a representative phoneme unit in terms of the phoneme environment and fundamental frequency currently of interest. Here the
25 set of phoneme data assigned penalty based upon power and phoneme duration, stored in area 204, are delivered

delivered to the sorting processing unit 206 and the
sorting processing unit 206 is instructed to sort the
results by penalty value. The sorting processing unit
206 performs sorting on the basis of the two types of
5 penalties relating to power and phoneme duration (e.g.,
using the sum of the two penalty values) and stores the
sorted results in area 207. When sorting processing
ends, the data determination processing unit 208 selects
phoneme data having the smallest penalty and stores it
10 in area 209 for the purpose of employing this data as
representative phoneme data. If a plurality of phoneme
units having the minimum penalty value appear, the data
determination processing unit 208 selects the phoneme
unit located at the head of the sorted results. This is
15 equivalent to selecting one phoneme unit randomly from
those having the smallest penalty.

Thus, in accordance with the first embodiment, the
optimum phoneme data is selected, based upon a penalty
relating to power and a penalty relating to phoneme
20 duration, from a phoneme data set in which the phoneme
environments and fundamental frequencies are identical.

[Second Embodiment]

The first embodiment has been described in regard
to a case where the phoneme environment (the "triphone",
25 namely the phoneme of interest and one phoneme on each
side thereof) and the average fundamental frequency F_0

of the phoneme are used as criteria for selecting phoneme data. However, in instances where the triphone of a combination not contained in the database is required, the need arises to use an alternate "left-
5 phone". (a phoneme environment comprising the phoneme of interest and the phoneme to its left), "right-phone" (a phoneme environment comprising the phoneme of interest and the phoneme to its right) or "phone" (the phoneme of interest alone). In the second embodiment, therefore,
10 there will be described a case where selection of phoneme data other than a specified triphone (such selected phoneme data will be referred to as a "triphone substitute") is taken into account.

Fig. 4 is a block diagram illustrating functions
15 relating to phoneme data selection processing for selecting the optimum phoneme data from a set of phoneme data in which the phoneme environments and fundamental frequencies are identical. The functions are those of a speech synthesizing apparatus according to the second
20 embodiment. This embodiment differs from the first embodiment in Fig. 2 in that the apparatus further includes a processing unit for assigning element-number penalty. Other areas or units 400 to 409 correspond to the areas or units 200 to 209, respectively, of Fig. 2.
25 The processing unit 410 assigns a penalty in dependence upon the number of elements in a set of phoneme data.

The speech synthesizing processing includes a procedure relating to phoneme data selection processing, which is implemented by the above-described functional blocks, for selecting optimum phoneme data from a set of phoneme data having identical phoneme environments and fundamental frequencies. This procedure will now be described. Fig. 5 is a flowchart illustrating a procedure according to the second embodiment relating to phoneme data selection processing for selecting the optimum phoneme data from the set of phoneme data having identical phoneme environments and fundamental frequencies.

Steps S501 to S503 are similar to steps S301 to S303 (Fig. 3) in the first embodiment. It should be noted that if a specified triphone does not exist in the database, the triphone retrieval at step S501 involves the retrieval of the alternate candidates left-phone, right-phone or phone (the aforesaid "triphone substitute"). In this case, for example, firstly, retrieval of left-phone is carried out. If the left-phone does not exist in the database, then retrieval of right-phone is carried out. If the right-phone does not exist, then retrieval of phone is carried out. Alternatively, the sequence of retrieval may be different between vowel and consonant. For example, as for vowel, the retrieval is carried out in the sequence

of left-phone, right-phone and phone. As for consonant, the retrieval is carried out in the sequence of right-phone, left-phone and phone.

In the second embodiment, use of a triphone substitute means that a specified triphone does not exist. As long as a specified triphone is contained in the database, however, this triphone is adopted. At step S504, therefore, it is determined whether a triphone substitute has been obtained as the result of retrieval. If a triphone substitute has not been obtained, i.e., if the specified triphone has been obtained, control skips step S505 and proceeds to step S506. When the specified triphone is retrieved, therefore, processing similar to that of the first embodiment is executed. If it is determined at step S504 that a triphone substitute has been retrieved, on the other hand, control proceeds to step S505. Here the processing unit 505 assigns a penalty in dependence upon the numbers of elements in the set of phoneme data. In a case where the specified triphone is absent, the processing unit 505 counts the numbers of elements contained in the phoneme data set, the count being performed per each triphone phoneme environment group (a group classified by the environment comprising the phoneme concerned and one phoneme on each side thereof) of the alternate candidate left-phone (or right-phone or

phone). In this embodiment, if the number of items of phoneme data of an applicable triphone phoneme environment is small (two or less), then the processing unit 505 adds a penalty (0.5 points) onto all of the phoneme data concerned. In other words, the processing unit 505 judges that data having only a low frequency of appearance in a sufficiently large database is not reliable.

For example, consider a case where a triphone t.A.k does not exist in the database and is to be replaced by a left-phoneme t.A.*. If two triphones t.A.p and 20 triphones t.A.t exist in the database, allocating a triphone substitute, which is to replace the triphone t.A.k, from among triphones t.A.t of which 20 exist will 15 provided a higher probability of obtaining phoneme data of good quality.

If a penalty based upon number of elements is thus assigned, the result is stored in area 504, which is for holding the results of penalty assignment, and then 20 control proceeds to step S506. Step S506 involves processing equivalent to that of step S304 in the first embodiment. In the second embodiment, a penalty based upon number of elements is assigned in addition to the penalty based upon power and the penalty based upon 25 phoneme duration. As a result, phoneme data is selected upon taking all of these three penalties into

consideration. In a case where a specific triphone is retrieved and processing proceeds directly from step S504 to step S506, penalty based upon number of elements is not taken into account.

5 Thus, in accordance with the second embodiment, it is possible to select the proper phoneme data inclusive of triphones that can be alternates.

10 In the embodiments set forth above, a case has been described in which penalty assignment processing is executed in order of power penalty and phoneme-duration penalty (and then element-number penalty in the second embodiment). However, this does not impose a limitation upon the present invention, for the processing may be executed in any order. Further, an arrangement may be adopted in which these penalty assignment processing operations are executed concurrently.

15 Further, in each of the foregoing embodiments, 2.0 points is adopted as the penalty value for the power and phoneme-duration penalties. However, this does not impose a limitation upon the present invention, for it is obvious that a suitable value may be set. In addition, equal penalties need not be applied as the penalties relating to both characteristics.

20 In the second embodiment, a case in which 0.5 is set as the value of the element-number penalty is described. However, this does not impose a limitation

upon the present invention, for a suitable value may be set.

Furthermore, in each of the foregoing embodiments, a case is described in which a penalty is assigned to
5 the one-third of phoneme data starting from smaller values (or to the one-third of phoneme data starting from larger values) in regard to the sorted results. However, this does not impose a limitation upon the present invention. For example, it is possible to
10 change the method of penalty assignment depending upon the number of items of phoneme data or the properties of the phoneme data contained in the database. In such case a penalty may be assigned to data for which the difference relative to an average value is greater than
15 a threshold value.

Further, in the foregoing embodiments, there is described a method of selecting representative phoneme data in which the target is a phoneme data set that satisfies a specific phoneme environment and fundamental
20 frequency. However, this does not impose a limitation upon the present invention. For example, it is possible to use a phoneme data set for which the matter of interest is solely the phoneme environment and to adopt the fundamental frequency as a factor for assigning a
25 penalty.

Further, in each of the above embodiments, there is

described a method of selecting a representative phoneme unit on demand, wherein the target is a phoneme data set that satisfies a specific phoneme environment and fundamental frequency. However, an arrangement may be adopted in which a phoneme lexicon obtained by applying the processing of the first embodiment in advance is created based upon all conceivable phoneme environments and fundamental frequencies.

Further, in each of the foregoing embodiments, a case in which the sorting processing unit and the area for holding the sorted results are designed for general-purpose use. However, this does not impose a limitation upon the present invention. For example, an arrangement may be adopted in which there is provided a sorting processor exclusively for the processing unit that assigns the power penalties and a sorting processor exclusively for the processing unit that assigns the phoneme-duration penalties.

In each of the foregoing embodiments, a case in which the areas for storing data are implemented by memory (RAM) is described. However, this does not impose a limitation upon the present invention because any storage media may be used.

Further, in each of the foregoing embodiments, a case in which the components are constituted by the same computer is described. However, this does not impose a

limitation upon the present invention because these components may be implemented by computers or processors distributed over a network.

Further, in each of the foregoing embodiments, a case in which a program is stored in a control memory (ROM) is described. However, this does not impose a limitation upon the present invention because the program may be stored in any storage media. The same operations performed by the program may be carried out by circuitry.

The present invention can be applied to a system constituted by a plurality of devices or to an apparatus comprising a single device (e.g., a copier or facsimile machine, etc.).

Furthermore, it goes without saying that the invention is applicable also to a case where the object of the invention is attained by supplying a storage medium storing the program codes of the software for performing the functions of the foregoing embodiment to a system or an apparatus, reading the program codes with a computer (e.g., a CPU or MPU) of the system or apparatus from the storage medium, and then executing the program codes.

In this case, the program codes read from the storage medium implement the novel functions of the invention, and the storage medium storing the program

codes constitutes the invention.

Further, the storage medium, such as a floppy disk, hard disk, optical disk, magneto-optical disk, CD-ROM, CD-R, magnetic tape, non-volatile type memory card or
5 ROM can be used to provide the program codes.

Furthermore, besides the case where the aforesaid functions according to the embodiment are implemented by executing the program codes read by a computer, it goes without saying that the present invention covers a case
10 where an operating system or the like running on the computer performs a part of or the entire process in accordance with the designation of program codes and implements the functions according to the embodiments.

It goes without saying that the present invention
15 further covers a case where, after the program codes read from the storage medium are written in a function expansion board inserted into the computer or in a memory provided in a function expansion unit connected to the computer, a CPU or the like contained in the
20 function expansion board or function expansion unit performs a part of or the entire process in accordance with the designation of program codes and implements the function of the above embodiment.

Thus, in accordance with the present invention, as
25 described above, it is possible to provide a speech synthesizing apparatus capable of selecting better

phoneme units, as a result of which synthesized speech
of superior quality can be produced. The invention
provides also a method of controlling this apparatus and
a storage unit storing a program for implementing this
5 control method.

As many apparently widely different embodiments of
the present invention can be made without departing from
the spirit and scope thereof, it is to be understood
that the invention is not limited to the specific
10 embodiments thereof except as defined in the appended
claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A speech synthesizing apparatus comprising:

storage means for storing plural items of phoneme data;

5 retrieval means for retrieving phoneme data, in accordance with given retrieval conditions, from the plural items of phoneme data stored in said storage means;

10 first penalty assigning means for assigning a penalty that is based upon an attribute value to each item of phoneme data retrieved by said retrieval means; and

15 selection means for selecting, from the phoneme data retrieved by said retrieval means, and based upon the penalty assigned by said first penalty assigning means, phoneme data to be employed in synthesis of a speech waveform.

2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said storage means stores respective items of attribute information together with the plural items of phoneme data; and

said first penalty assigning means obtains an attribute value from the attribute information stored in said storage means.

25 3. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein the attribute information includes phoneme environment,

phoneme boundary, fundamental frequency, power and phoneme duration.

4. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said retrieval means retrieves phoneme data that satisfies a
5 specified phoneme environment.

5. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said retrieval means retrieves phoneme data that satisfies a specified phoneme environment and fundamental frequency.

6. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said
10 first penalty assigning means sorts retrieved phoneme data based upon a prescribed attribute value and assigns a penalty value on the basis of order obtained by sorting.

7. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said
15 first penalty assigning means assigns a penalty using power and phoneme duration of each item of phoneme data as the attribute values.

8. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said first penalty assigning means:

20 sorts the items of phoneme data in order of decreasing power and assigns a power-related penalty on the basis of the order obtained by sorting, in such a manner that a small penalty is assigned to phoneme data whose power is close to an average value; and

25 sorts the items of phoneme data in order of decreasing phoneme duration and assigns a phoneme-

duration-related penalty on the basis of the order obtained by sorting, in such a manner that a small penalty is assigned to phoneme data whose phoneme duration is close to an average value.

- 5 9. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

alternate retrieval means for retrieving phoneme data that satisfies some of the retrieval conditions in a case where phoneme data that conforms to the retrieval
10 conditions in said retrieval means does not exist;

counting means for grouping phoneme data, which has been retrieved by said alternate retrieval means, on the basis of a phoneme environment, and counting the items of phoneme data on a per-group basis; and

- 15 second penalty assigning means for assigning a penalty on the basis of a count obtained by said counting means to the phoneme data retrieved by said alternate retrieval means, this penalty being assigned in addition to the penalty assigned by said first
20 penalty assigning means.

10. The apparatus according to claim 9, wherein the retrieval conditions include phoneme environment; and

- said alternate retrieval means retrieves phoneme data which agrees with part of a phoneme environment
25 specified in the retrieval conditions.

11. The apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the

phoneme environment specified in the retrieval conditions is a triphone composed of an applicable phoneme and phonemes on both sides thereof; and

said alternate retrieval means retrieves phoneme data for which the applicable phoneme and its left side phoneme agree with the retrieval conditions, or phoneme data for which the applicable phoneme and its right side phoneme agree with the retrieval conditions.

12. A speech synthesizing method comprising:

10 a storage step of storing plural items of phoneme data;

a retrieval step of retrieving phoneme data, in accordance with given search retrieval conditions, from the plural items of phoneme data stored at said storage step;

15 a first penalty assigning step of assigning a penalty that is based upon an attribute value to each item of phoneme data retrieved at said retrieval step; and

20 a selection step of selecting, from the phoneme data retrieved at said retrieval step, and based upon the penalty assigned at said penalty assigning step, phoneme data employed in synthesis of a speech waveform.

13. The method according to claim 12, wherein said storage step stores respective items of attribute information together with the plural items of phoneme

data; and

said first penalty assigning step obtains an attribute value from the attribute information stored at said storage step.

5 14. The method according to claim 13, wherein the attribute information includes phoneme label, phoneme boundary, fundamental frequency, power and phoneme duration.

10 15. The method according to claim 12, wherein said retrieval step retrieves phoneme data that satisfies a specified phoneme environment.

16. The method according to claim 12, wherein said retrieval step retrieves phoneme data that satisfies a specified phoneme environment and fundamental frequency.

15 17. The method according to claim 12, wherein said first penalty assigning step sorts retrieved phoneme data based upon a prescribed attribute value and assigns a penalty value on the basis of order obtained by sorting.

20 18. The apparatus according to claim 12, wherein said first penalty assigning step assigns a penalty using power and phoneme duration of each item of phoneme data as the attribute values.

25 19. The method according to claim 18, wherein said first penalty assigning step:

sorts the items of phoneme data in order of

decreasing power and assigns a power-related penalty on the basis of the order obtained by sorting, in such a manner that a small penalty is assigned to phoneme data whose power is close to an average value; and

5 sorts the items of phoneme data in order of decreasing phoneme duration and assigns a phoneme-duration-related penalty on the basis of the order obtained by sorting, in such a manner that a small penalty is assigned to phoneme data whose phoneme
10 duration is close to an average value.

20. The method according to claim 12, further comprising:

an alternate retrieval step of retrieving phoneme data that satisfies some of the retrieval conditions in
15 a case where phoneme data that conforms to the retrieval conditions at said retrieval step does not exist;

a counting step of grouping phoneme data, which has been retrieved at said alternate retrieval step, on the basis of a phoneme environment, and counting the items
20 of phoneme data on a per-group basis; and

a second penalty assigning step of assigning a penalty on the basis of a count obtained at said counting step to the phoneme data retrieved at said alternate retrieval step, this penalty being assigned in
25 addition to the penalty assigned at said first penalty assigning step.

21. The method according to claim 20, wherein the retrieval conditions include phoneme environment; and

said alternate retrieval step retrieves phoneme data which agrees with part of a phoneme environment
5 specified in the retrieval conditions.

22. The method according to claim 21, wherein the phoneme environment specified in the retrieval conditions is a triphone composed of an applicable phoneme and phonemes on both sides thereof; and

10 said alternate retrieval means retrieves phoneme data for which the applicable phoneme and its left side phoneme agree with the retrieval conditions, or phoneme data for which the applicable phoneme and its right side phoneme agree with the retrieval conditions.

15 23. A storage medium storing a control program for causing a computer to execute speech synthesis using phoneme data, said control program having:

code of a storage step of storing plural items of phoneme data;

20 code of a retrieval step of retrieving phoneme data, in accordance with given search retrieval conditions, from the plural items of phoneme data stored at said storage step;

code of a first penalty assigning step of assigning
25 a penalty that is based upon an attribute value to each item of phoneme data retrieved at said retrieval step;

and

code of a selection step of selecting, from the
phoneme data retrieved at said retrieval step, and based
upon the penalty assigned at said first penalty

5 assigning step, phoneme data employed in synthesis of a
speech waveform.

24. The storage medium according to claim 23, wherein
said control program further has:

code of an alternate retrieval step of retrieving
10 phoneme data that satisfies some of the retrieval
conditions in a case where phoneme data that conforms to
the retrieval conditions at said retrieval step does not
exist;

code of a counting step of grouping phoneme data,
15 which has been retrieved at said alternate retrieval
step, on the basis of a phoneme environment, and
counting the items of phoneme data on a per-group basis;
and

code of a second penalty assigning step of
20 assigning a penalty on the basis of a count obtained at
said counting step to the phoneme data retrieved at said
alternate retrieval step, this penalty being assigned in
addition to the penalty assigned at said first penalty
assigning step.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A speech synthesizing apparatus for synthesizing a speech waveform stores speech data, which is obtained by adding attribute information onto phoneme data, in a database. In accordance with prescribed retrieval conditions, a phoneme retrieval unit retrieves phoneme data from the speech data that has been stored in the database and retains the retrieved results in a retrieved-result storage area. A processing unit for assigning a power penalty and a processing unit for assigning a phoneme-duration penalty assign the penalties, on the basis of power and phoneme duration constituting the attribute information, to a set of phoneme data stored in the retrieved-result storage area. A processing unit for determining typical phoneme data performs sorting on the basis of the assigned penalties and, based upon the stored results, selects phoneme data to be employed in the synthesis of a speech waveform.

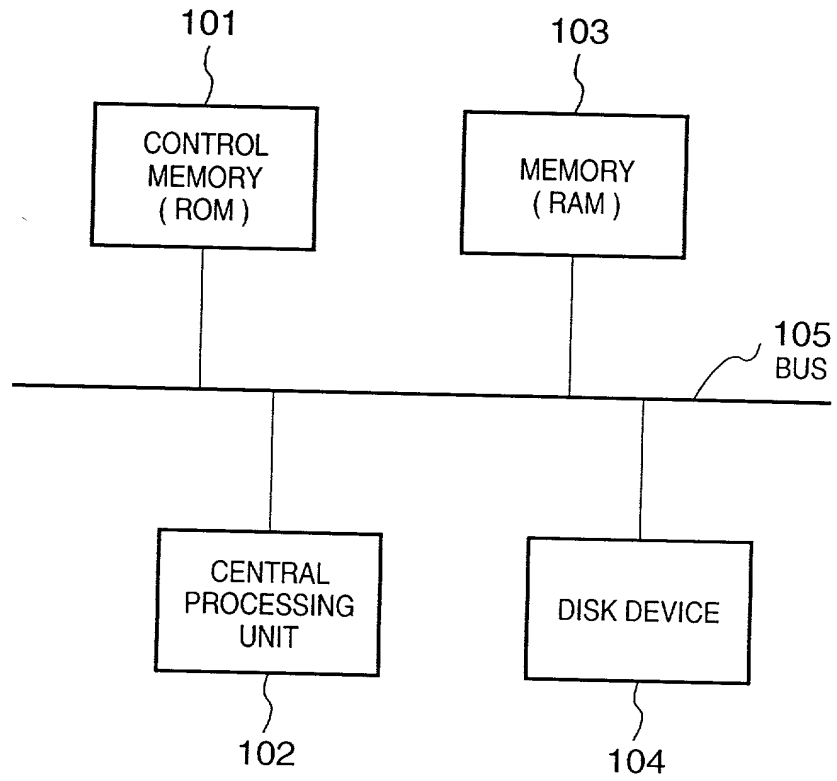
FIG. 1

FIG. 2

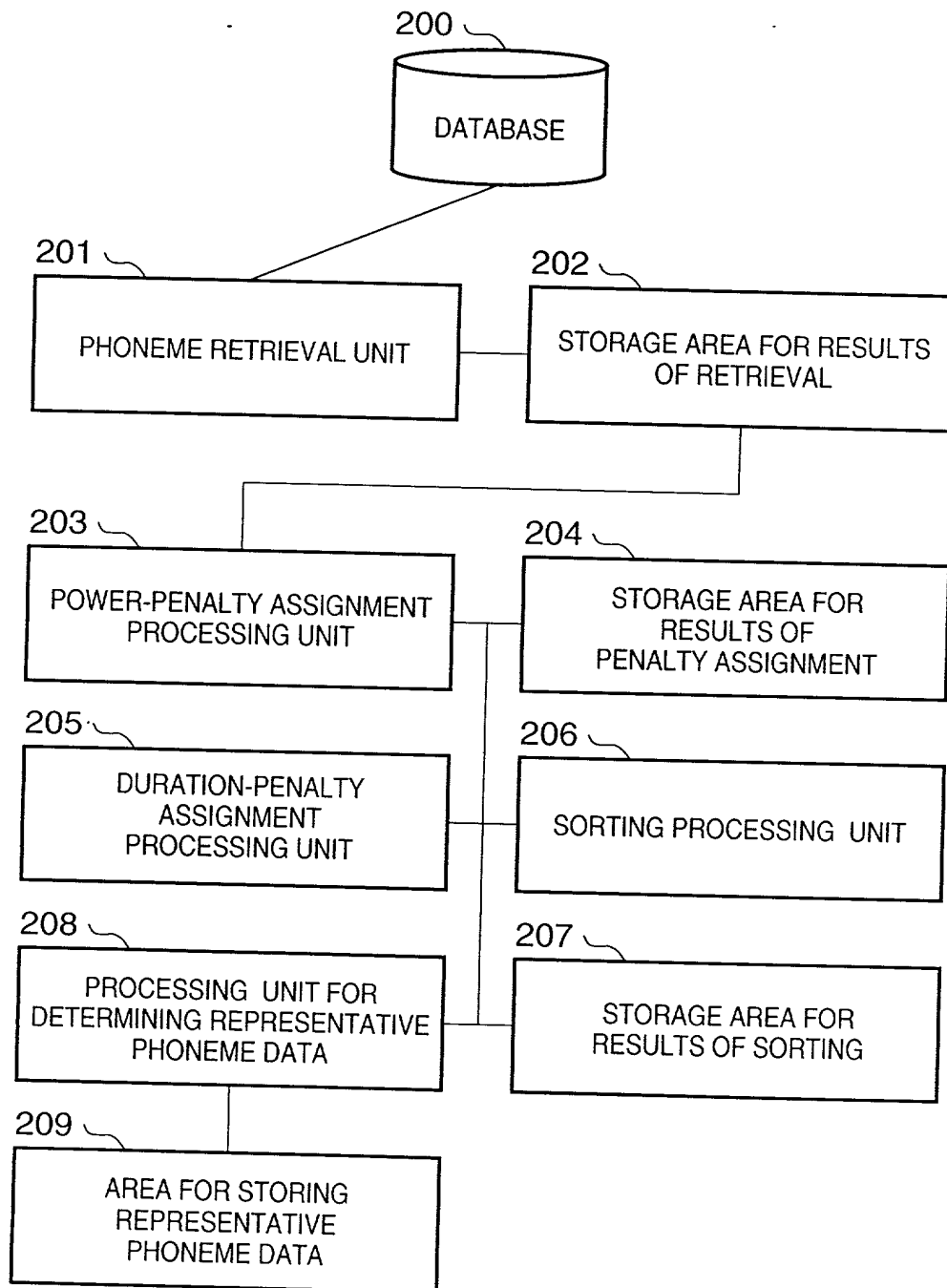


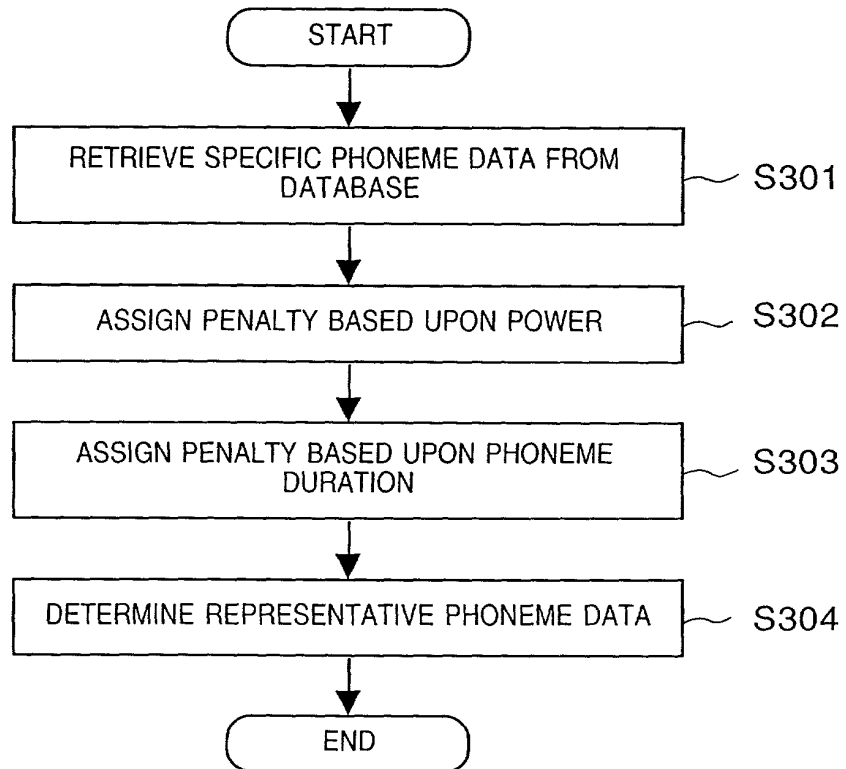
FIG. 3

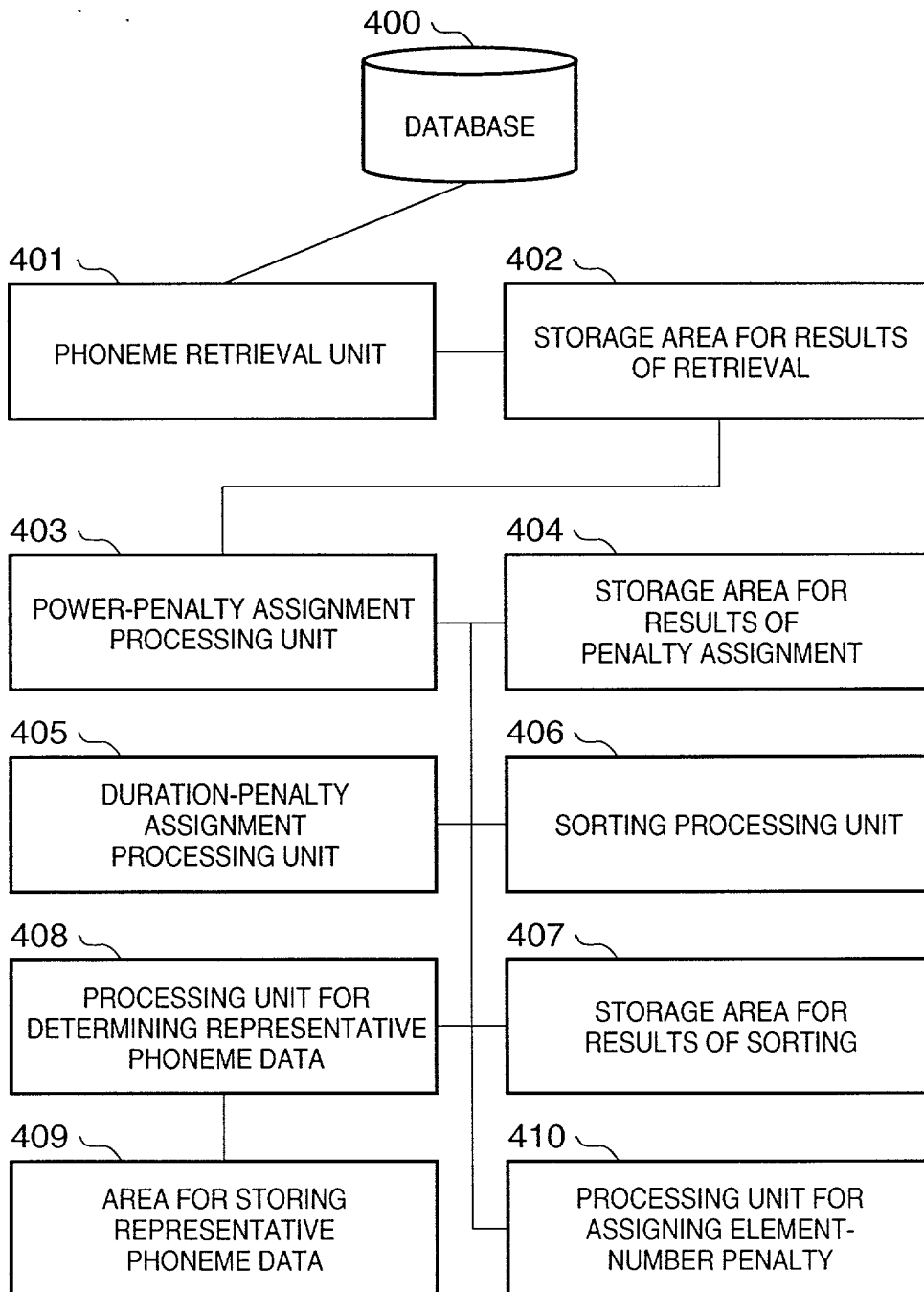
FIG. 4

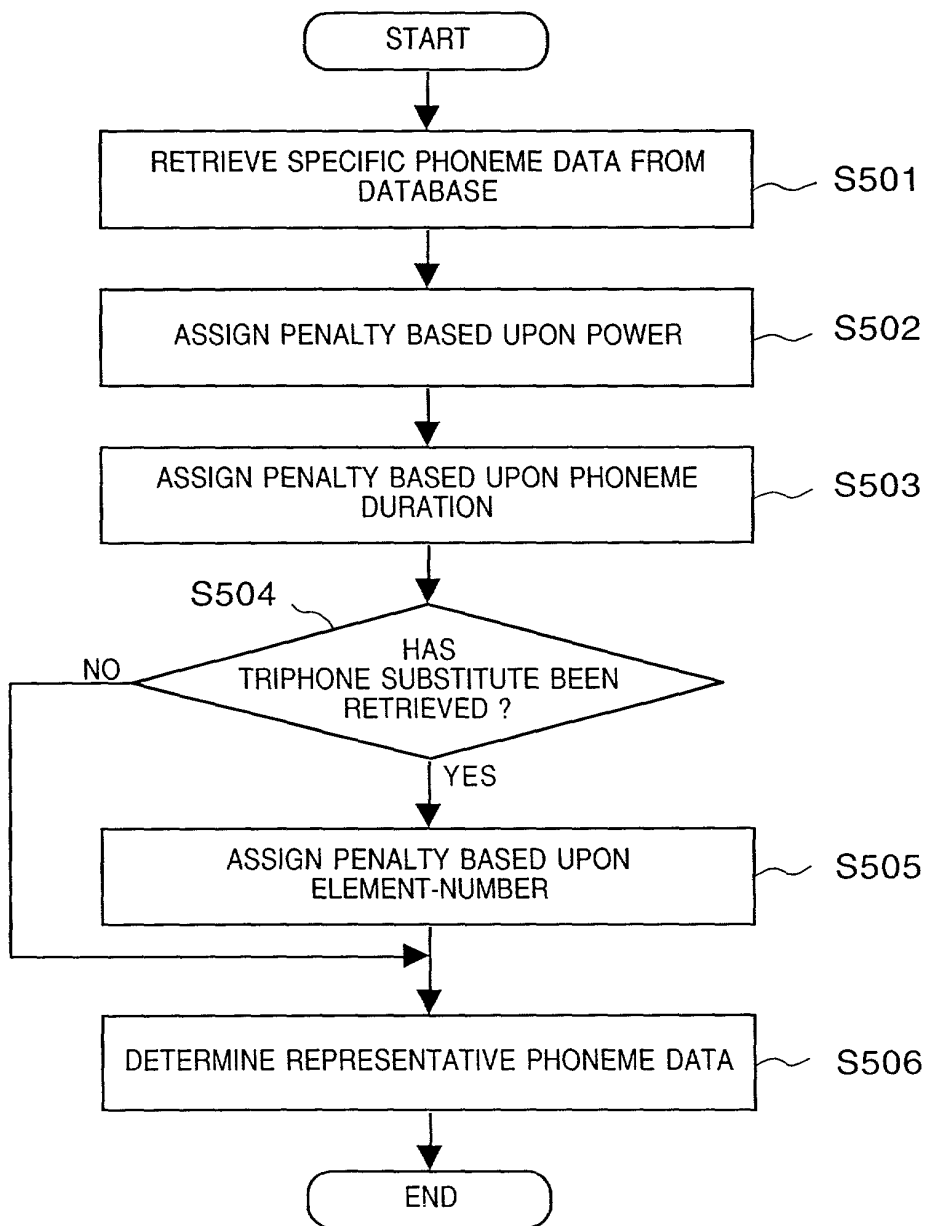
FIG. 5

FIG. 6